

NOTE

AN AGRARIAN FORCE BEFORE THE FLAMES: A GREEK BLUEPRINT FOR EUROPE'S WILDFIRE PREVENTION STRATEGY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The year 2023 marked the worst year for wildfires in Europe throughout the past century, with Greece having dealt with the largest ever recorded fire in the European Union (“EU”).¹ In 2023, EU Member State governments spent a collective €40.6 billion on services related to fire protection,² while over 500,000 hectares of land burnt to a crisp.³ Catastrophic fires, though, can have devastating effects aside from the economic toll they bring. Frequent fires can erode biodiversity in a given region by destroying forests and local environments faster than nature can regrow and rebuild to counter the environmental effects of fires.⁴ Fires can likewise cause significant physical and mental health issues for those who have lived through them, or have lost their families, livelihoods, homes, or other properties because of them.⁵ “Wild” fires have become ever more frequent over the past decade,⁶ yet according to the EU, ninety-six percent of these fires in Europe occur as the result of some human agency.⁷ Needless to

1. See *Wildfires: 2023 Among the Worst in the EU in This Century*, EUR. COMM’N (Apr. 10, 2024), https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/wildfires-2023-among-worst-eu-century-2024-04-10_en [<https://perma.cc/UT2Q-VY6J>]; *Greece Wildfire Declared Largest Ever Recorded in EU*, GUARDIAN (Aug. 29, 2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/29/greece-wildfire-declared-largest-ever-recorded-in-eu> [<https://perma.cc/3UEB-BWK3>].

2. See *General Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)*, EUROSTAT, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/GOV_10A_EXP_custom_3112132/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=93d61af6-244f-4e69-8d8d-f50adce2582d&page=time:2023 [<https://perma.cc/K5D4-VCYX>] (last visited Mar. 22, 2025) (fire-protective services expenditure, 2023).

3. See *Wildfires: 2023 Among the Worst in the EU in This Century*, *supra* note 1. 500,000 hectares translate to 5,000 square kilometers, which is about the size of the entirety of the Grand Canyon, or forty-eight times larger than the entirety of Paris proper. *How Big Is 500,000 Hectares?*, MEASURE THINGS, <https://www.themeasureofthings.com/results.php?comp=area&unit=h&amt=500000> [<https://perma.cc/AYX2-DWL7>] (last visited June 15, 2026).

4. See Luke T. Kelly et al., *Fire and Biodiversity in the Anthropocene*, 370 SCI. 1, 1 (2020).

5. See Colleen E. Reid & Melissa M. Maestas, *Wildfire Smoke Exposure Under Climate Change: Impact on Respiratory Health of Affected Communities*, 25 CURRENT OP. PULMONARY MED. 179, 181–83 (2019); Patricia To et al., *The Impact of Wildfires on Mental Health: A Scoping Review*, 11 BEHAV. SCI. 1, 1 (2021).

6. See *Wildfires and Climate Change*, NASA (Feb. 6, 2025), <https://science.nasa.gov/wildfires-and-climate-change/> [<https://perma.cc/2PXP-T4QQ>].

7. See JESÚS SAN-MIGUEL-AYANZ ET AL., EUR. COMM’N, FOREST FIRES IN EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA 2021, at 4 (2022), <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

say, uncontrollable and sometimes unpredictable fires are a growing central concern of those who are most prone to annual fires, and who have the most to lose, especially in Europe.⁸

The EU has already established several measures to facilitate the efforts of, and cooperation between, its Member States to fight rampaging fires, and remedy the environmental effects past fires have had on the European territory. For one, the EU has dedicated billions of euros to promote biodiversity through funding reforestation initiatives by interested parties and Member States themselves.⁹ Additionally, the EU provides access to real-time satellite data to monitor ongoing fires and regions at particular risk of fires, fire-risk forecasts, and analyses of past fires and the successful, or unsuccessful, fire-prevention and fire-fighting efforts made by states for any given year.¹⁰

However, even the EU admits that tactics to suppress active fires only go so far.¹¹ While increasing the capacity to suppress fires is necessary, “it will not be sufficient without, at the same time, increasing efforts to prevent fire from igniting in the first place. There is a need for an integrated wildfire risk management approach and a close collaboration between EU institutions and wildfire management services and civil protection authorities.”¹² Thus, in addition to continuing to fight active fires, it appears necessary for the EU to implement some form of policy, mechanism, or regulatory body which can ensure that EU territories are kept in conditions that can prevent, or at least curb, the ignition of fires.

To that end, the European Union may benefit from observing and analyzing a former Agrarian police-like force that formed in the 1830s in Greece and existed *de jure* up until 2010—the

repository/handle/JRC130846 [https://perma.cc/9SMA-6CQC] [hereinafter *FOREST FIRES 2021*].

8. See *Wildfires*, EUR. COMM’N, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/wildfires_en [https://perma.cc/5G63-AQRJ] (last visited Apr. 25, 2025).

9. See *EU Action on Biodiversity Financing*, EUR. COMM’N (Apr. 14, 2026), https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/biodiversity/eu-action-biodiversity-financing_en [https://perma.cc/CF4G-9L4F] [hereinafter *Financing Guide*].

10. See *European Forest Fire Information System*, COPERNICUS, <https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/> [https://perma.cc/PP76-W6DB] (last visited Feb. 17, 2025).

11. See *FOREST FIRES 2021*, *supra* note 7, at 5.

12. *Id.*

Agrofylaki (*Αγροφυλακή*).¹³ As part of its various duties, this force ensured that landowners followed agrarian law and kept their land clean from overgrown plants and dry grass which pose a significant risk for starting and quickly spreading fires, all while acting as mediators and arbitrators between landowners in potential disputes.¹⁴ Particularly important to this body was that its members were generally comprised of locals patrolling their respective assigned regions who were therefore familiar with local geomorphology and landscapes, and aware of who owned which parcel of property up to exactly what point.

Yet, whether the EU could create a similar body to patrol and enforce agrarian law within its Member States is a question of national sovereignty. While it may be unlikely that the EU could create a direct counterpart to the Agrofylaki, the European Union could at the very least encourage its Member States to establish similar agrarian forces or direct existing forces to engage in similar agrarian efforts, all while providing technical, strategic, and logistical support, in addition to financial assistance or other subsidies to promote fire safety within Europe.

Part II of this Note will discuss the background of wildfires and their destructive effects, while Part III will delve into the history of the Greek Agrofylaki, its responsibilities, as well as its dissolution and assumption of its duties by other bodies. Part IV analyzes current EU efforts to combat wildfires and their destructive effects but notes the central problem with current EU law being insufficient for the purposes of preventing fires before ignition. Part V will then consider whether and how the EU could create its own agrarian force modeling the core responsibilities of the Agrofylaki, which had success in fire prevention. Part V will also consider how the EU should fund national efforts to engage in

13. Agros (*Άγρος*) means “arable fields,” while Fylax (*Φύλαξ*) means “guardian.”

14. The author in describing the activities and duties of the Agrofylaki and the members of the force in part relies on interviews conducted by the author with local shepherds, agriculturalists, vineyard and olive grove owners, olive oil exporters, and legal professionals that shared their knowledge of and/or experiences interacting with and working alongside the Agrofylakes in the course of their agricultural and other professional activities. Interviews with Christos Nikoloudakis, Pantelis Nikoloudakis, Manolis Tzanidakis, Giannis Tsikoudakis, Manolis Petrakakis, Dimitris Parasiris, Kostas Zacharakis, Spyros Iordanoglou, and Apostolos Agelarakis, in Greece (2021–2024) [hereinafter Author Interviews].

similar fire prevention efforts if the body cannot make its own Agrofylaki-like agency.

II. WILDFIRES AND THEIR CATASTROPHIC EFFECTS

An uncontrolled wildfire has the capacity to catastrophically damage or completely destroy whatever is in its path, with equally substantial and destructive after-effects on the surrounding environment, agriculture, local and regional economies, and social orders. In contrast, small scale or controlled fires have the capacity to promote biodiversity and act as a catalyst for the remnants of healthy ecosystems to develop by cleaning out organic and natural debris and overgrowth while providing grounds for new life to grow within the burnt regions.¹⁵ Biodiversity is critical to all ecosystems with diverse plant and animal species engaging in climate regulation, water purification, pest control, and pollination, while simultaneously playing a crucial role for the provision of food and medicine for humanity.¹⁶ Yet, at a macro-level, devastating fires can have a reverse effect on biodiversity, leading to severe damage and loss of animal and plant life.¹⁷ Particularly, increased frequency of fires in fire-prone regions and fires reoccurring in areas where they are historically rare prevents nature from taking the time necessary to ever recover or rebuild.¹⁸ With more frequent fires, even plants that utilize fires to release seeds for pollination do not have the capacity to mature before the next fire, and animals cannot take shelter in or harvest resources from habitats that nature fails to reestablish, disrupting the balance and dynamics of the ecosystem.¹⁹

15. See *Science: Wildfire Impacts*, CAL. DEP'T OF FISH & WILDLIFE, <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Science-Institute/Wildfire-Impacts> [<https://perma.cc/UC5Y-YGYZ>] (last visited Mar. 12, 2025).

16. See *What Is Biodiversity?*, AM. MUSEUM NAT. HIST., <https://www.amnh.org/research/center-for-biodiversity-conservation/what-is-biodiversity> [<https://perma.cc/CV43-LH3U>] (last visited Mar. 19, 2025).

17. See Sonia Aronson, *Wildfires Should Be Considered a Top Threat to Survival of Species*, UCLA NEWSROOM (Nov. 20, 2020), <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/wildfire-threat-survival-of-species> [<https://perma.cc/9CG2-E89N>]. This was the case with 2019–2020 bushfires in Australia which led to several animal species inching closer to extinction. See Romani Davare, *The Impact of Wildfires on Biodiversity and the Environment*, EARTH (Aug. 5, 2022), <https://earth.org/impact-of-wildfires/> [<https://perma.cc/SY24-4GQ8>].

18. See Kelly et al., *supra* note 4, at 1.

19. See *id.*

Catastrophic fires likewise have significant effects on the environment at large, which raise significant climate change concerns. Fires naturally release various forms of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as a result of whatever they burn.²⁰ Yet, while virtually all plant species have the capacity to remove carbon from the atmosphere, frequent and devastating fires prevent plants from maturing quickly enough to fulfill their evolutionary functions.²¹ Further, with plants and trees burnt and destroyed in mountainous regions, erosion takes place, removing necessary soil for plants and trees to grow while simultaneously increasing the risk of flash flooding during heavy rainfall.²²

In terms of local environmental effects, fires can decimate agricultural industries. Fires can burn away decades' worth of effort spent cultivating crops on farms or raising and nurturing animals on ranches.²³ Even for nearby areas lucky enough not to burn, smoke and ash can stunt the growth and quality of crops such as potatoes or grapes, or completely rot crops like corn.²⁴ In addition to farmers who rely on their cultivated products losing their livelihoods as a result of such fires,²⁵ local communities lose access to local produce—disrupting the food supply chain²⁶—while some regions may see their entire export industry paralyzed, if not lost completely.²⁷ Examples include fires ravaging the Greek island of Chios destroying its unique export of mastic-gum leading

20. See *Wildfires and Climate Change*, CTR. FOR CLIMATE & ENERGY SOL., <https://www.c2es.org/content/wildfires-and-climate-change/> [https://perma.cc/2KB3-3TBE] (last visited Mar. 19, 2025).

21. See *id.*; see also Alejandra Borunda, *How Climate Change Supercharges Wildfires in the West*, NAT'L GEOGRAPHIC (Sept. 17, 2020), https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/climate-change-increases-wildfires-west-us?userab=ng_pw_copy-287*variant_b-1127 [https://perma.cc/KJ5Z-P4YG].

22. See *Burn Scars Have an Increased Risk of Flash Flooding and Debris Flows*, NAT'L WEATHER SERV., <https://www.weather.gov/sew/burnscar> [https://perma.cc/2GUV-BNU4] (last visited Mar. 19, 2025).

23. See Megan Forrester, *How LA Fires Impact Farmers and Agriculture Industry*, ABC NEWS (Jan. 15, 2025), <https://abcnews.go.com/US/la-fires-impact-farmers-agriculture-industry/story?id=117621670> [https://perma.cc/93DW-ZUW8].

24. See Maya Kolsky, *How Do Wildfires Impact Crop Cultivation?*, AGRITASK (July 18, 2023), <https://www.agritask.com/blog/wildfires-and-crop-cultivation/> [https://perma.cc/5CHT-FFJ5].

25. See Forrester, *supra* note 23.

26. See Kolsky, *supra* note 24.

27. See Dalton Bennett, *Greek Island Fire Ravages Unique Export Industry*, YAHOO NEWS (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.yahoo.com/news/greek-island-fire-ravages-unique-export-industry-165424953--finance.html> [https://perma.cc/6XGN-TNGY].

to an annual €3 million loss and requiring over a decade to recreate pastures,²⁸ and Californian winemakers being forced to abandon cultivation of grapes destroyed through hazardous air conditions caused exclusively by excessive and lingering wildfire smoke from fires in neighboring regions.²⁹

A weakened local environment and agricultural industry can likewise cripple regional economies. With fires destroying local agricultural industries, governments and local communities must increase their expenditures on imports in order to replace produce or other products that can no longer be developed and supplied locally.³⁰ Questions remain as to whether an increased reliance on imports following agricultural destruction because of fires would inadvertently discourage and deter local cultivators and producers from restarting their production of local products, and to what extent government support is necessary to revive local production.

Agricultural economy aside, extensive resources are necessary to extinguish rampaging fires. In terms of physical resources, it can be incredibly difficult to calculate just how many gallons of water are necessary to douse a given fire.³¹ Considering the recent 2024–2025 Palisades fire, which burned approximately 23,400 acres in California, the US government released over 2.2 billion gallons of water from dams to help combat the ongoing

28. *See id.*

29. *See* Aaron Romano, *How Did 2020's Wildfires Impact California Wines?*, WINE SPECTATOR (Mar. 23, 2021), <https://www.winespectator.com/articles/how-did-2020-s-wildfires-impact-california-wine> [https://perma.cc/47PB-7PYX].

30. This was the case in Maui, Hawaii, which needed to continue extensive imports after fires destroyed its already dwindling and struggling agricultural lands in 2023. *See* Ayurella Horn-Muller, *Hawai'i Wildfires' "Downward, Spiral-like Impact" on Food*, AXIOS (Aug. 21, 2023), <https://www.axios.com/2023/08/21/hawaii-wildfires-downward-spiral-like-impacts-on-food> [https://perma.cc/8HL2-7WH6]; Lena Easton-Calabria, *After Maui Fires, Food Security is a Major Concern and Opportunity*, RAND (Sept. 6, 2023), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/09/after-maui-fires-food-security-is-a-major-concern-and.html> [https://perma.cc/ZSF7-XM6Y]; *see also* Christopher G. Bousfield et al., *Substantial and Increasing Global Losses of Timber-Producing Forest Due to Wildfires*, 16 NATURE GEOSCIENCE 1145, 1146 (2023).

31. Some scholars have attempted to calculate the amount of water necessary to douse various forms of fires, with one method focusing on quantifying observable indicators like flame size and associated heat released, but acknowledge that generalizations are difficult where materials fueling fires, weather conditions, and effectiveness of water all vary and make estimates sensitive to assumptions. *See generally* Rickard Hansen, *Estimating the Amount of Water Required to Extinguish Wildfires Under Different Conditions and in Various Fuel Types*, 21 INT'L J. WILDLAND FIRE 525 (2012).

blaze—roughly 94,000 gallons of water per acre.³² Specialized planes also exist that can scoop and drop roughly 1,500 gallons of water per trip, making numerous trips per day depending on the size, intensity, and location of a fire.³³ The number of aircraft used to quench a given fire also varies, although as a baseline, the EU has funded the development of twelve firefighting planes and three helicopters to be allocated to specific Member States and primed for deployment across Europe in response to any given wildfire disaster.³⁴ Monetarily speaking, EU Member State governments spent a total of €34.1 billion on fire protection services in 2021,³⁵ In 2022 total expenditure increased to €37.4 billion,³⁶ and in 2023 it increased again to €40.6 billion.³⁷ The cost of damage to property—to offices, businesses, and homes—can itself amount to billions, with losses across the EU amounting to €4.1 billion in 2023,³⁸ and damages from the aforementioned Palisades fire alone reaching an estimated US\$135–150 billion.³⁹

32. See Ella Nilsen, *2.2 Billion Gallons of Water Flowed Out of California Reservoirs Because of Trump's Order to Open Dams*, CNN (Feb. 3, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/03/climate/trump-california-water-dams-reservoirs/index.html> [https://perma.cc/6LE8-KBE5].

33. See Alexandra Byrne, *Super Scooper Planes that Fight Wildfires Are 'Rugged, Reliable' – and Rare*, NBC NEWS (Jan. 15, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/super-scooper-planes-fight-wildfires-are-rugged-reliable-rare-rcna187795> [https://perma.cc/L9BD-9FTY].

34. See *rescEU*, EUR. COMM'N, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/resceu_en [https://perma.cc/4N9B-2VPR] (last visited Apr. 16, 2025). The helicopters are expected to be ready in 2026, with the planes expected by 2028. See *id.*

35. See *How Much Did EU Governments Spend on Fire Protection?*, EUROSTAT (Sept. 13, 2023), <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230913-2> [https://perma.cc/K5LA-XB6Y].

36. See *General Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)*, EUROSTAT, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/GOV_10A_EXP_custom_3112132/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=93d61af6-244f-4e69-8d8d-f50adce2582d&page=time:2022 [https://perma.cc/M2RB-5MCX] (last visited Mar. 22, 2025) (fire-protective services expenditure, 2022).

37. See *General Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)*, *supra* note 2 (fire-protective services expenditure, 2023).

38. See Eleanor Harmsworth, *Wildfires Cost Europe €4.1 Billion as Temperature Hit Records*, BLOOMBERG (Sept. 4, 2023), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-09-04/greece-suffers-most-damage-as-wildfires-cost-europe-4-1-billion> [https://perma.cc/E3EE-B53N].

39. See Alex Veiga, *The LA County Wildfires Could Be the Costliest in US History, Early Estimates Say*, AP NEWS (Jan. 11, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/california-wildfires-natural-disasters-losses-insurance-recovery-d2f24e44d75503118643151eae947fb> [https://perma.cc/T2D7-FQS9].

Lastly, destructive fires can have traumatic effects on a country's social order. As mentioned, fires can destroy people's homes, properties, livelihoods, and families in an instant. Unsurprisingly, serious mental health issues emerge in victims of wildfires and can persist for years after the fires.⁴⁰ For example, post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD") is not uncommon following wildfires, with associated insomnia, anger, stress, and sometimes violence having been found, and some studies see PTSD emerging in nearly all children for a short period of time in a fire's wake.⁴¹ Depression and anxiety are likewise common effects, lasting from three to eighteen months and in some cases even up to ten years post-wildfire, depending on the level of destruction and loss witnessed or experienced.⁴² Linked to these effects, some studies have shown an increase in substance abuse, including heavy alcohol consumption and sometimes use of narcotics.⁴³ Unfortunately, suicide rates also appear to rise following catastrophic wildfires, with some scholars finding a twenty-three percent increase, translating to roughly ten additional lives lost following an average fire.⁴⁴

Fires, and specifically the smoke and toxins emitted from materials burned by fires, can also significantly deteriorate physical health. Depending on whether a burned area is rural or urban rather than a wildland or forest setting—where rural and urban areas can encompass heavy plastics, metals, oil and gas, and other materials—resulting emissions can include methane and toxic black carbon which can reduce air quality, act as carcinogens, and lead to respiratory illnesses in anyone overly exposed to these gases and aerosols.⁴⁵ Further, these emissions can exacerbate existing illnesses that affect the lungs, heart, nervous system, and

40. See To et al., *supra* note 5, at 1; see also *Mental Health Effects*, EUR. CLIMATE & HEALTH OBSERVATORY (July 3, 2024), <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/observatory/evidence/health-effects/mental-health-effects> [<https://perma.cc/J3G3-CBKD>] (describing effects of climate change on mental health generally).

41. See To et al., *supra* note 5, at 9.

42. See *id.* at 10–11.

43. See *id.* at 12.

44. See Chandler Hubbard et al., *Catastrophic Wildfires & Suicide 2* (June 11, 2026) (unpublished manuscript), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5179556 [<https://perma.cc/J6DG-9ZE6>].

45. See Reid & Maestas, *supra* note 5, at 181–83; *Wildfires and Climate Change*, *supra* note 6; Junri Zhao et al., *Enhanced CH₄ Emissions from Global Wildfires Likely Due to Undetected Small Fires*, 16 NATURE COMM'NS 1, 1 (2025).

various other organs.⁴⁶ Furthermore, aside from the mental health effects of fires themselves, prolonged exposure to smoke and toxins can lead to cognitive impairment and memory loss.⁴⁷ In the most severe cases, wildfire smoke can prove fatal, with death resulting from wildfire-induced illnesses or by compromising already weakened immune systems.⁴⁸

Thus, the effects of fires can be catastrophic—either instantly or in an extended, more indirect fashion—for individuals, small groups, communities, regions, and states, and on environments, economies, and social orders. Fighting fires after they emerge is necessary, but it involves combatting a problem that society should seek to prevent from emerging in the first place. While fires are, and will likely continue to be, an inevitability, states, and particularly the EU, may nonetheless benefit from implementing measures to protect against the ignition of fires, or at the very least prevent their spread before they become uncontrollable.

III. THE GREEK AGROFYLAKEI

A. The Agrofylaki in History

During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Greece maintained an agrarian police-like force—the Agrofylaki—comprised of local personnel who operated across their given prefectures and islands, ensuring both public and privately owned land was kept secure, within regulation, and clean from dry plants, overgrowth, and waste. As a result of operations by members of the force—Agrofylakes (*Αγροφύλακες*)—Greek land was somewhat free from fires, or at least from the incredibly frequent and destructive ones that now occur annually within the country. While the Agrofylaki no longer exists, as will be discussed below, Europe, and the EU in particular, may be able to learn valuable lessons from what worked for this historic agrarian force when

46. See *Wildfires*, WHO, https://www.who.int/health-topics/wildfires#tab=tab_2 [<https://perma.cc/TE7Y-HDR9>] (last visited Mar. 23, 2025).

47. See *id.*

48. See Colleen E. Reid et al., *Critical Review of Health Impacts of Wildfire Smoke Exposure*, 124 ENV'T HEALTH PERSP. 1334, 1336 (2016).

considering and implementing policies and mechanisms to prevent the start of and mitigate the spread of fires.⁴⁹

Formed in 1836 “for the protection of forestation,” the structure and membership selection process of the Agrofylaki differed across the various parts of the then newly formed Hellenic Republic.⁵⁰ Originally, municipal mayors chose and appointed members of the Agrofylaki and in 1856 Greek law required a landowner vote to approve of selected candidates.⁵¹ By 1907, the landowner vote became anonymized and required court approval and ratification.⁵² Some of the Greek islands—in particular Lesbos, Crete, and the Ionian Islands—treated the Agrofylaki as a policing force with quasi-military like capabilities which reported to the “Gendarmerie” in their respective regions.⁵³ The Gendarmerie in this context is derived from the French term *gens d’armes* meaning “men-at-arms,” a military force that is engaged in law enforcement duties to maintain internal security amongst civilians on the territorial peripheries of the country.⁵⁴ Legislation in 1923 sought to standardize the Agrofylaki across the country to prevent local differences in leadership, treatment, duties, and authority of the force.⁵⁵ Eventually, a Greek presidential decree in 1966 formally established that the Agrofylaki would be an armed and uniformed

49. As indicated in note 14, the author relies on personal interviews conducted by the author with various members of the Greek community who have knowledge and experience with the Agrofylaki in order to describe the activities and efforts of the body. For a list of interviewees, see Author Interviews, *supra* note 14.

50. See *Istoriko Agrofylakis [History of the Agrarian Force]*, PANELLINIOS OMOSPONDIA APOSTRATON SOMATON ASFALIAS (Nov. 11, 2015), <https://www.poasa.gr/istoriko-agrophulakis> [<https://perma.cc/49VE-4HA2>] [hereinafter *History of the Agrarian Force*].

51. See *id.*

52. See *id.*

53. See *id.* A Gendarmerie in this context—the Chorofilaki (Χωροφυλακή), the “protector of the space”—was a uniformed military force which was necessary for law enforcement purposes in areas of Greece that were otherwise too small or too remote from the mainland or other larger islands to maintain their own internal security. From the Greek perspective and its international treaties, a Gendarmerie is a part of traditional military activities, but the subject of significant contestation with its international neighbors over island sovereignty rights and a proper military presence. See Panayotis G. Agelarakis, *Greek Island Sovereignty in the Aegean: The Turkish Government's Misuse and Misrepresentation of International Law and of the Treaties of Lausanne, Montreux, and Paris*, 14 AM. J. CONTEMP. HELLENIC ISSUES 7 (2023).

54. See *French Gendarmerie*, NATO STABILITY POLICING CTR. EXCELLENCE, <https://www.nspcoe.org/about-us/sponsoring-nations/french-republic/french-gendarmerie/> [<https://perma.cc/23MU-EA3D>] (last visited Apr. 28, 2025).

55. See *History of the Agrarian Force*, *supra* note 50.

Gendarmerie force for the entire nation that would maintain agricultural safety and efficiency in rural environments around cities and villages while preventing agricultural offenses, ratifying 1954 legislation which detailed the force's duties,⁵⁶ explained further below. The Agrofylaki served with central departments and regional administrations and stations, consisting of senior staff, rural police, and low-level officers, similar to a military hierarchy.⁵⁷

The Agrofylaki in each prefecture in Greece consisted of locals patrolling areas they were greatly familiar with, areas that any non-local centralized force would find difficult to access and navigate considering Greece's topography consisting of many small islands. Members of the force were generally respected by local communities, considered protectors and laborers towards community welfare.⁵⁸ Agrofylakes were knowledgeable of the borders and boundaries of each parcel of land they patrolled, the identities of landowners, and those of neighboring landowners.⁵⁹ As locals, they were also privy to the local geographic area—familiar with local roads and access routes, whether hidden paths or bridges existed, where they led to, and whether a hidden or secluded piece of land was owned by a private individual or the government.⁶⁰ Likewise, they were acutely aware of whether any conflicts existed between landowners, and which landowner would be a likely instigator of any dispute, placing the members of the force in a prime position to act as mediators between landowners and “keep the peace” in their respective regions.⁶¹ Aside from mediation, Agrofylakes could act as arbiters, providing final, binding decrees on disputes between landowners, or could refer overly complex issues to judges.⁶²

56. *See id.*; *see also* Nomothetiko Diatagma (1954:3030) Peri Agrofylakis [Legislative Decree on the Agrarian Force], *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 1954, A:244 (Greece). The decree ratifying the 1954 law mentioned that officers could be armed if the Ministry of the Interior so decides. *See* Nomothetiko Diatagma (1954:3030) art. 27. Several interviewees confirmed the Agrofylakes were armed. Author Interviews, *supra* note 14.

57. *See History of the Agrarian Force, supra* note 50.

58. *See generally* Manolis G. Sergis, “The Rural Guards’ Logbooks of Incidents” as a Folklore Source: A Greek Island Case Study, 2015 *J. ETHNOGRAPHY & FOLKLORE* 29, 40 (describing perceptions of the Agrofylaki relying in part on logbooks of the Agrofylakes).

59. Author Interviews, *supra* note 14.

60. *Id.*

61. *Id.*

62. *Id.*; *see also* Sergis, *supra* note 58, at 41–42.

As part of their duties, Agrofylakes patrolled their assigned regions and ensured that landowners maintained their properties in a safe and regulated fashion.⁶³ Land was to be trimmed from seasonal overgrowth and overly dry plants and trees, both of which in drier summer months are at particular risk of sparking and spreading wildfires, in addition to any excessive waste abandoned on landowners' properties.⁶⁴ Additionally, the Agrofylakes ensured that landowners were abiding by various regulations, including prohibitions on building structures or homes without proper permits or in dangerous areas⁶⁵—an issue that has recently led to several deaths with illegally and poorly developed homes built in flash flood zones.⁶⁶ Moreover, Agrofylakes ensured that individuals were not setting “controlled” fires to burn wasted materials during warm and dry seasons when such action was forbidden.⁶⁷ Further, Agrofylakes sought to ensure that landowners and shepherds were acting with sustainability in mind, ensuring they were not overusing community resources by, say, allowing sheep to overgraze public land or another's property, essentially policing to mitigate the “tragedy of the commons.”⁶⁸ For violations of law and regulations, Agrofylakes could issue fines.⁶⁹ Furthermore, they also protected land where possible from potential malicious actors such as poachers and bandits.⁷⁰

Agrofylakes were incentivized to fulfill their duties as they had personal responsibility for violations of law that they were, or reasonably should have been, aware of that detracted from public resources or caused damage to local areas.⁷¹ For any fire that could have reasonably been prevented through enforcing land upkeep,

63. Author Interviews, *supra* note 14.

64. *Id.*

65. *Id.*

66. See Helena Smith, *Illegal Building 'Played Central Role' in Floods that Killed 20 in Athens*, GUARDIAN (Nov. 21, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/21/illegal-building-played-central-role-in-floods-that-killed-20-in-athens> [<https://perma.cc/ME56-4R5Y>]. Illegally built homes are also a risk factor with the spread of fires. See Jason Horowitz, *In Aftermath of Greek Fires, Suspicion Combines with Grief and Recrimination*, N.Y. TIMES (July 25, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/25/world/europe/greece-wildfires-arson.html> [<https://perma.cc/UBV2-369L>].

67. Author Interviews, *supra* note 14.

68. *Id.*

69. *Id.*; see also Sergis, *supra* note 58, at 40.

70. Author Interviews, *supra* note 14.

71. *Id.*

for any abuse of water irrigation systems, or for any overgrazing of public land, the local Agrofylakes were held both personally as well as professionally responsible.⁷² This liability also served to deter Agrofylakes from succumbing to pressure to ignore violations by locals who, given their ties to the land and community, may have been family, friends, or others they were personally connected to.⁷³

B. Dissolution of the Agrofylaki and the Spread of Its Duties

The Agrofylaki has since dissolved in Greece and no equivalent body has effectively replaced it. The de facto decline of the Agrofylaki began under wider governmental authoritarianism during the reign of the military Junta that controlled Greece between 1967 and 1974.⁷⁴ The Junta rose to power amid lingering national divisions that followed the bloody Greek Civil War of 1946 to 1949, fought between the Communist party and government, which left deep fractures between the Communist party of Greece and other non-communist left leaning supporters against those in the political right.⁷⁵ Operating in accordance with US direction and guidance linked to financial, strategic, and provisional support during the Cold War, the Greek Junta utilized the various government forces in its control to conduct mass surveillance of political dissidents and opponents of the regime.⁷⁶ Individuals themselves could also report the suspicious behavior, or suspicious thoughts, of their neighbors to proper authorities, be it the police, Gendarmerie, or Agrofylaki, as part of a wider “collective civic-national mindedness.”⁷⁷ Doing so allowed informants to obtain police-issued certificates attesting to their support for the government, which helped to secure a wide range of public services, university scholarships, and even government documentation like passports or driver’s licenses.⁷⁸ Public

72. *Id.*

73. *Id.*

74. See John S. Bowman, *Civil War and Its Legacy*, in *Greece*, BRITANNICA (last updated Aug. 13, 2026), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Greece/Civil-war-and-its-legacy#ref298041> [https://perma.cc/2349-GRYM].

75. See *id.*

76. See Minas Samatas, *A Brief History of the Anticommunist Surveillance in Greece and Its Lasting Impact*, in *HISTORIES OF STATE SURVEILLANCE IN EUROPE AND BEYOND* 49, 49–50, 58 (Kees Boersma et al. eds., 2014).

77. See *id.* at 55.

78. See *id.*

servants and government employees were themselves forced to engage in surveillance and report on dissident behavior, or they risked government branding of being “disloyal,” losing their positions, associated government benefits, and becoming subjects of surveillance themselves.⁷⁹ The Greek government maintained files on all Greek citizens stigmatized as opposition members or general dissidents.⁸⁰

Following the fall of the Junta in 1974, the center-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (“PASOK”)⁸¹ party won the 1981 general election, promising an overhaul of the Greek government for the common person alongside independence from US influence in the country.⁸² In an effort to restructure the policing system in Greece, the government de facto abolished the Agrofylaki in 1984 and transferred its responsibilities and personnel to the newly established Greek Police Force.⁸³ The Agrofylaki’s dissolution, alongside that of other bodies like the Gendarmerie, was intended to restructure and redistribute the responsibilities of these devolving military bodies that had surveilled and marginalized PASOK’s voters and others in the past. Although PASOK exposed and pledged in 1984 to destroy the Junta’s “dossier society” of 41.2 million filings maintained on Greeks for their dissident views, the files were not destroyed until 1989, under the succeeding New Democracy party-led coalition government.⁸⁴

79. See *id.* at 53–55. According to local shepherds and agriculturalists, the Agrofylaki allegedly kept tabs on Communists, sympathizers, and leftists that they became aware of through either neighborhood reporting as well as their own personal knowledge and connections. Author Interviews, *supra* note 14.

80. See Samatas, *supra* note 76, at 57, 59–60.

81. See *Idrytiki Diakhryxi – PASOK* [Founding Declaration – PASOK], PASOK, <https://pasok.gr/diakhryxi/> [<https://perma.cc/XC9C-FC9B>] (last visited Apr. 28, 2025).

82. See Andriana Ierodiatonou, *Socialist Capture Election in Greece*, WASH. POST (Oct. 19, 1981), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/10/19/socialist-capture-election-in-greece/604481f6-f49f-4d51-9566-f99d1f001188/> [<https://perma.cc/NPD8-P9AG>].

83. See Nomos (1984:1481) Organismos Ypourgeiou Dimosias Taksis [Organization of the Ministry of Public Order] art. 9, *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 1984, A:152 (Greece); *Diatagma* (1984:582) *Systasi, Organosi kai Leitourgia ton Kentrikon kai Perifereiakon Ypiresion tou Ypourgeiou Dimosias Taksis* [Establishment, Organization, and Operation of the Central and Regional Services of the Ministry of Public Order] art. 1, *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 1984, A:208 (Greece).

84. See Samatas, *supra* note 76, at 60.

In 1989, agrarian and rural security throughout Greece was centralized and assumed by the Ministry of the Interior.⁸⁵ In 1990, the newly elected New Democracy party attempted to reestablish the Agrofylaki in line with its duties as detailed in previous 1954 legislation, but the body was never fully re-realized due to the absence of necessary implementing administrative acts.⁸⁶ Following the establishment of prefectural administrations in 1994,⁸⁷ rural and agrarian security remained under each prefecture's control until these duties moved to municipal police departments from 2000 onwards.⁸⁸

85. See Nomos (1989:1832) Tropopoiisi kai Sympliroi tis Nomothessias gia tin Topiki Aftodioikisi, tin Apokentrosi kai Alles Diatakseis [Amendment and Supplementation of the Legislation on Local Self-Government, Decentralization, and Other Provisions] art. 41 ¶ 16, Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias [E.K.E.D.] 1989, A:54 (Greece). Agrofylakes remained insured by an Agricultural Police Employee Welfare Fund rather than the traditional Municipal Community Employees Insurance Fund that covered other prefectural civil servants. See *id.* Some former Agrofylakes were transferable as agents between various agencies as needed while remaining under their own welfare fund. However, in 2013, as a result of the economic crisis in Greece, the Troika mandated the suspension of thousands of individuals, and while the government attempted to delay its enforcement of the mandate and reallocate personnel where possible, this included former members of the Agrofylaki who remained in the aforementioned welfare fund. See *Pros diathesimotita kai oi agrofylakes tis kybernisis Mitsotaki* [The agrarian forces of Mitsotakis' government also face layoffs], AYTDIOIKISI (July 9, 2013), <https://www.aftodioikisi.gr/ipourgeia/diathesimotita-sto-stoxastro-oi-agrofilakes-tis-kivernisis-mitsotaki/> [https://perma.cc/QLK8-LNG4]; *Diathesimotita: Idou i teliki symfonia me tin troika* [Suspensions: Here is the final deal with the Troika], AYTDIOIKISI (July 7, 2013), <https://www.aftodioikisi.gr/ipourgeia/diathesimotita-idou-i-teliki-simfonia-me-tin-troika/> [https://perma.cc/MN9Y-32TK].

86. See Nomos (1990:1892) Gia ton Eksynchronismo kai tin Anaptyxi kai Alles Diataxeis [Law on Modernization, Development, and Other Provisions] art. 110, Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias [E.K.E.D.] 1990, A:101 (Greece).

87. See Nomos (1994:2218) Idrysi Nomarchiakis Aftodioikisis, Tropopoiisi Diatakseon gia tin Protovathmia Aftodioikisi kai tin Perifereia kai Alles Diatakseis [Establishment of Prefectural Self-Government, Amendment of Provisions on First-Tier Self-Government and the Region, and Other Provisions] art. 3, Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias [E.K.E.D.] 1994, A:90 (Greece).

88. See Diatagma (1995:410) Kodikopoiisi se Eniaio Keimeno Nomou me Titlo "Dimotikos kai Koinotikos Kodikas" ton Ischyouson Diatakseon tou Dimotikou kai Koinotikou Kodika [Codification into a Single Statutory Text Entitled "Municipal and Communal Code" of the Provisions in Force of the Municipal and Communal Code] art. 24, Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias [E.K.E.D.] 1995, A:231 (Greece); Nomos (2000:2819) Idrysi Etaireias "Olympiako Chorio 2004 A.E.", Prostasia Olympiakon Symvolon kai Simaton kai Alles Diatakseis [Establishment of the Company "Olympic Village 2004 S.A.", Protection of Olympic Symbols and Marks, and Other Provisions] art. 26 ¶ 1, Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias [E.K.E.D.] 2000, A:84 (Greece).

Although the Agrofylaki continued to exist *de jure* after 1990 despite its functional dissolution, it was formally disbanded in 2011 following major administrative reform in Greece,⁸⁹ with similar duties to be performed by a new Forestry Agency under the Ministry of the Environment and Energy.⁹⁰ The Forestry Agency did not assume all former duties of the Agrofylaki in either law or practice. Instead, its mission is limited to maintaining oversight and authority over forest management, forest-fire prevention, and related enforcement against perpetrators of forest-related crimes.⁹¹ Rather than the Agrofylaki's local-focused approach, the Forestry Agency adopted a mostly centralized model focused on administrative oversight.

While all the major duties of the Agrofylaki were subsumed into other bodies, now split between the municipal police and within the Ministry of the Environment and Energy, there is no longer a set of local personnel that is dedicated to all forms of rural and agrarian security while maintaining arbitral and other law enforcement authority that commanded the same level of respect as the Agrofylakes. Far from simple political appointees, Agrofylakes were specialized, trained to ensure rural and agrarian preservation and security through extensive training at the Agronomic Academy of the Greek Agrofylaki which was dissolved by the same piece of legislation that had the Forestry Service assume the duties of Agrofylaki.⁹² Current personnel may not be specialized, nor are they trained extensively at similar agrarian institutions, but undergo thorough general law enforcement training.

89. Following the emergence and worsening of the financial crisis, the 2010 Kallikratis Programme sought incredibly extensive administrative reform, overhauling and abolishing old administrative structures, procedures, and institutions in pursuit of modernisation, to make what some scholars described as "a smaller state." See Christina Akrivopoulou et al., *The "Kallikratis Program": The Influence of International and European Policies on the Reforms of Greek Local Government*, 33 *ISTITUZIONI DEL FEDERALISMO* 653, 659–63 (2012).

90. See Nomos (2011:3938) *Systasi Grafeiou Antimetopisis Peristatikon Aftthairesias sto Ypourgeio Prostatias tou Politi kai Alles Diatakseis* [Establishment of an Office for Addressing Incidents of Arbitrary Conduct in the Ministry of Citizen Protection and Other Provisions] art. 21, *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 2011, A:61 (Greece). The Ministry was originally named the Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Climate Change.

91. See *id.*

92. See Nomos (2011:3938) art. 21 ¶ 3 (Greece).

Indeed, activities formerly conducted by the Agrofylaki are not reflected to the same degree by either the Municipal Police Departments or relevant authorities in the Ministry of the Environment and Energy. Dedicated and trained individuals no longer patrol their respective regions specifically to determine adherence to agrarian laws. Since 2023, Greek law moved in the right direction by creating a national framework for preventative fire-protection measures on private properties, including a National Register which citizens are required to annually submit declarations of compliance to that they cleaned and maintained their land throughout the fire season, while the municipalities may conduct sample land inspections using various forms of technology.⁹³ This obligation was further revised for 2026 with a deadline requiring cleaning of land by June 22 of 2026.⁹⁴ While fines can be, and at times are, issued for overgrowth or waste that can increase the risk of sparking and spreading fires—up to €2,000 for inadequate compliance—and even criminal penalties are possible for false declarations—€5,000 and at least six months' imprisonment⁹⁵—roaming through any rural community in Greece will show the regular, overbearing prevalence of dry grass and overgrowth, with fires just as prevalent and ever more destructive.⁹⁶ This existing model of quasi-voluntary compliance illustrates the continuing need for active local patrol and in situ field verification. Formal reporting obligations alone cannot

93. See Nomos (2023:5075) *Anadiarthrosi Politikis Prostatias - Ethnikos Michanismos Enaerias Diasosis kai Aerodiakomidon kai Alles Epeigouses Diatakseis gia tin Kratiki Arogi* [Restructuring of Civil Protection - National Air Rescue and Airlift Mechanism and Other Urgent Provisions for State Assistance] art. 31 ¶¶ 1-2, *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 2023, A:206 (Greece).

94. See *Katharismos Oikopedon - Prolipsi Pyrkagion* [Clearing of Plots - Fire Prevention], YPOURGEIO KLIMATIKIS KRISIS KAI POLITIKIS PROSTATIAS [Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection], <https://civilprotection.gov.gr/katharismos-oikopedon-prolipsi-pyrkagion> [<https://perma.cc/723R-UUUS>] (last visited June 16, 2026).

95. See Ypourgiki Apofasi (2026:1157) *Kathorismos ton Metron Proliptikis Pyroprostatias kai ton Ypochreoseon Katharismou Oikopedikon kai Akalypton Choron* [Determination of Preventive Fire Protection Measures and Obligations to Clean Plots and Uncovered Areas] art. 8 ¶¶ 1-7, *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 2026, B:2323 (Greece). Violators have a ten-day window to correct their violation and will be given a fifty percent reduction in their penalties, but civil organs of the municipality will follow up with on-site inspection of the land for verification. *See id.*

96. See *Review of the 2025 Fire Season by WWF Greece and the FLAME Group of the National Observatory of Athens*, WWF (Nov. 19, 2025), <https://www.wwf.gr/en/?20142366%2FReview-of-the-2025-Fire-Season-by-WWF-Greece-and-the-FLAME-Group-of-the-National-Observatory-of-Athens> [<https://perma.cc/5DUL-4YPF>].

ensure that land is actually maintained, or that false declarations are detected before ignition risk becomes unmanageable.

Interestingly, the Ministry of the Environment and Energy can declare private land a protected forest area (*Δασική Έκταση*) when overgrown by woody or bushy plant overgrowth, or even mountainous or rocky terrains that are in the middle of overgrown areas, making it impossible for landowners to cultivate their land without extensive legal proceedings all while still being taxed.⁹⁷ This rule derives from Article 24 of the Greek Constitution which obligates the government to protect the environment, prohibiting the conversion of forested areas for any purpose unless properly authorized for public use or agricultural cultivation for the benefit of the national economy.⁹⁸ Areas that are designated as forests must remain as forests, unless the government otherwise recognizes that land as private, or determines that aerial photos taken in 1945 and 1960 show that land was then under agricultural cultivation; therefore if land which did not once appear “agricultural” in historical photos, is clearly overgrown today, and has not already been recognized as private, it can be declared as a protected forested area.⁹⁹ Once declared a protected forested area, landowners lose the ability to control even the cleaning of the land

97. See Nomos (1979:998) *Peri Prostatias ton Dason kai ton Dasikon en Genei Ektaseon tis Choras* [On the Protection of Forests and Forest Lands in General of the Country] arts. 3, 14, *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 1979, A:289 (Greece) (describing what government may declare as protected forested areas); Nomos (2003:3208) *Prostasia ton Dasikon Oikosystematon, Katartisi Dasologiou, Rythmisi Empragmaton Dikaionaton epi Dason kai Dasikon en Genei Ektaseon kai Alles Diatakseis* [Protection of Forest Ecosystems, Establishment of a Forest Registry, Regulation of Property Rights over Forests and Forest Lands in General, and Other Provisions] art. 10, *Ephemeris tes Kyverneseos tes Hellenikes Demokratias* [E.K.E.D.] 2003, A:303 (Greece) (explaining that evidence of legal title and ownership will supersede Ministry’s declaration of land as protected forested areas). Land will be declared protected forested areas for environmental purposes including soil stability, water retention, erosion prevention, and habitats for wildlife.

98. See 1975 *Syntagma* [Syn.] [Constitution] art. 24 (Greece).

99. See Nomos (1979:998) art. 3 (Greece). Land that is traditionally cultivated, used, and owned by landowners may have been passed through families for generations via inheritance or informal transfer, without consistent registration, and century-long Ottoman occupation and later Nazi occupation of Greece may have complicated title registration, thus fueling title disputes. Greece is only now completing its formal land registry, a process which only began in 1995. See TNH Staff, *Greek Cadastre-Land Registry: A 30-Year Project Is in the Final Stretch*, NAT’L HERALD (Apr. 21, 2026), <https://www.thenationalherald.com/greek-cadastre-land-registry-a-30-year-project-is-in-the-final-stretch/> [https://perma.cc/79KQ-MHAG].

they claim as their own, even through the use of livestock to graze overgrown grasses. Thus, until landowners succeed in lengthy court proceedings to prove their legal title,¹⁰⁰ during which time land may remain entirely unmanaged and uncleaned by any party, such designations as protected forested areas inadvertently expose regions to greater risk of fire ignition and spread.

The dissolution of the Agrofylaki and assumption of its duties by other forces has directly impacted the prevention, rather than the fighting, of fires. However, in the case of Greece, ineffective fire prevention policies and procedures only exemplify an already difficult challenge of mitigating and dousing active fires. The central commands of Greece's firefighting forces are in the major yet distant regions of Athens and Thessaloniki. Therefore, any time there is a fire outside of those areas that local forces are not able to handle alone, national and regional forces must mobilize towards distant locations throughout Greece. This only becomes more complicated when fires occur on small islands that have no firefighting forces of their own. Centralized firefighting forces dispatched to unfamiliar territory lack local expertise: they may be unfamiliar with the local topography, geography, and local roads, unaware of dangerous ravines and geomorphological features which may make it impossible to reach certain areas and they may not even have a local force to guide them effectively.

While times and the climate have changed since the prominence of the Agrofylaki in Greece, alongside general rural abandonment in the country facilitating overgrowth on unkept or poorly maintained land, there are valuable lessons that Europe can learn in seeking to enact policies on fire prevention by examining what worked well for the agrarian force before its devolution during the Cold War. Two principles appear particularly vital. For one, local expertise in land ownership, topographical variability, and geomorphology appears essential for quick and effective firefighting and fire prevention efforts. Second, the patrolling of land to ensure it is upkept, clean from waste and dry overgrowth, in compliance with agrarian law, and safe from potential malicious

100. See Nomos (1979:998) art. 3 ¶ 5 (Greece); see also *Dasikoi hartes: 22 erotiseis-apanthseis* [Forest maps: 22 questions-answers], TAXHEAVEN (Jan. 4, 2023), <https://www.taxheaven.gr/news/62191/dasikoi-xartes-22-erwthseis-apanthseis> [https://perma.cc/EC7U-8KRB].

actors, appears to be a critical process for fire prevention and “keeping peace.”

IV. CURRENT EU EFFORTS

Understanding the catastrophic impact that frequent and destructive fires have on regional stability, the EU as a supranational authority is well positioned to create, manage, and influence fire prevention and firefighting policy and tactics across its Member States—subsequently benefiting efforts to combat climate change and bolster European economies, social order, and public health. The EU currently attempts to mitigate the effects of fires and prevent their recurrence through two central means: extensive reforestation and funding mechanisms, and information-sharing systems linked to strategic assistance.

To combat the effects of devastating fires on biodiversity, erosion, and the economy, the EU can incentivize and fund reforestation efforts across Europe using local or other fire-resistant plants compatible with localities and not dangerously invasive to regional environments. Recognizing the need for such action, in 2020 the EU adopted the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which seeks to build resilience against the threats and effects of climate change, food insecurity, diseases, and forest fires.¹⁰¹ Central to this strategy is the EU’s Nature Restoration law, in force since August 2024, which seeks to reestablish and restore degraded ecosystems to combat the impacts of climate change and other natural disasters, including cleaning the air and improving water quality, and protecting against erosion and subsequent floods.¹⁰² With regard to forest fires specifically, the European Parliament and Council, in enacting the Nature Restoration Law, advised that any planning or implementation of policy on establishing forest security and supporting biodiversity must “take into account the risk of forest fire.”¹⁰³

101. See *Biodiversity Strategy for 2030*, EUR. COMM’N, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en [<https://perma.cc/NKD4-6AGA>] (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

102. See *Nature Restoration Law*, EUR. COMM’N, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_en [<https://perma.cc/P29J-QQ9S>] (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

103. See Regulation 2024/1991, 2024 O.J. (L) 1, 11–12, ¶ 63 [hereinafter *Nature Restoration Regulation*]. In particular, this Regulation requires Member States to ensure

While originally part of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Nature Restoration Regulation formalized the EU's pledge to plant three billion new trees throughout Europe by 2030, in addition to and aside from any trees planted for reforestation purposes.¹⁰⁴ Through these additional trees, the EU anticipates greater air purity, increased biodiversity, better combatting of erosion, and assistance in farming practices—all of which are means of mitigating the damaging effects of fires.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the EU seeks to ensure that the right trees are being planted in proper and compatible locations, including in agroforestry, agricultural arable land, and urban areas, while excluding areas where trees would be detrimental to local ecosystems.¹⁰⁶ The EU, though, is not itself engaging in planting trees under its pledge, as that role is left to Member State governments, private landowners, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and volunteers.¹⁰⁷ Rather, the EU's role is to act as an advisor, providing technical guidelines and standards while monitoring progress,¹⁰⁸ while providing financial support to those planting trees to assist in fulfilling its pledge.¹⁰⁹ The EU began tracking trees planted in late 2021,¹¹⁰ and as of January 2, 2026, over thirty-seven million trees have been planted by eighty-four different organizations among the twenty-seven EU Member States.¹¹¹ The European Union has

they increase standing and lying deadwood, which is critical for some plant and animal species, but a risk point for forest fires which the EU warns should be considered when complying with this regulation. *See id.* art. 12.

104. *See 3 Billion Trees*, EUR. COMM'N, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030/3-billion-trees_en [<https://perma.cc/6PQA-3D75>] (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

105. *See id.*

106. *See id.*

107. *See id.*

108. While the EU provides a data map for tracking where and how many trees were planted, it clarifies that the Commission does not actively monitor planting and relies on "a Declaration of Honour signed by the participating organisation or individual." *See id.*

109. *See id.*

110. *See Biodiversity: Three Billion Additional Trees by 2030 – Launch of MapMyTree Tool*, NETWORK NATURE (Dec. 10, 2021), <https://networknature.eu/networknature/article/three-billion-additional-trees-2030-launch-mapmytree-tool> [<https://perma.cc/JP8Y-QPFC>].

111. *See 3 Billion Trees*, FOREST INFO. SYS. FOR EUR., <https://forest.eea.europa.eu/policy-and-reporting/3-billion-trees> [<https://perma.cc/X4YA-7UNF>] (last modified Oct. 21, 2025).

admitted that it remains far from achieving its target of three billion trees by 2030.¹¹²

While there is no central financing mechanism, there are several EU and national level funding sources available to support stakeholders who seek to plant trees under this EU initiative. There are three types of funding and management modes available at the EU level—Shared Management, Direct Management, and Indirect Management.¹¹³ Under Shared Management, Member State authorities plan and manage EU funds in accordance with their own set priorities and projects to meet the objectives of the Pledge, while under European Commission guidance and supervision.¹¹⁴ Under Direct Management, the European Commission and its respective agencies retain full responsibility for managing the funding and the selection or implementation of relevant programs and projects that the Commission deems appropriate to meet the EU's Pledge.¹¹⁵ Under Indirect Management, though, funds are entrusted to institutions partnered with the EU, which then manage and disburse those funds to approved bodies supporting the Pledge.¹¹⁶ Additionally, the EU views national sources of funding that support domestic tree-planting efforts as either supplementary to EU funding or as a complete substitute for EU funds where applicable and appropriate.¹¹⁷

To support these funding mechanisms, the EU has allocated between 7.5 and 10 percent of its €1.074 trillion Multi-Annual Financial Framework ("MFF") budget for 2021–2027 to supporting biodiversity.¹¹⁸ The EU is expected to spend at least

112. See Louise Guillot, *EU 'Very Far' from Target to Plant 3B Trees, Commission Admits*, POLITICO (Mar. 20, 2024), <https://www.politico.eu/article/target-plant-3-billion-trees-european-commission/> [<https://perma.cc/DB3Z-G9KY>].

113. See *Financing Guide*, *supra* note 9, at 11.

114. See *id.* at 11–12. Examples of EU funding instruments under shared management include the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. See *id.* at 11.

115. See *id.* at 12. Examples of EU funding instruments under Direct Management include LIFE (exclusive to funding of biodiversity projects), Horizon Europe, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. See *id.*

116. See *id.* at 13. The only listed example partner institution under indirect management is the European Investment Bank ("EIB"). See *id.*

117. See *id.* See generally *id.* at 28–362 (describing the available national funding sources in each EU Member State).

118. See *Financing Guide*, *supra* note 9, at 11. Specifically, 7.5 percent will be allocated from 2024–2025, while 10 percent is allocated in 2026–2027. *Id.*

€15 billion on biodiversity by 2026.¹¹⁹ In addition to the MFF, funding is also sourced from NextGenerationEU, a stimulus package dedicated to improving healthcare, education, and a green future for Europe, which provides up to €672 billion in loans and grants up until 2026, portions of which may support biodiversity-related measures through Commission-approved national plans.¹²⁰

Reforestation efforts and financing/investment mechanisms aside, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 additionally seeks to improve the knowledge of Member States and the EU citizens on climate change, sustainability, and the environment in general.¹²¹ In order to achieve this goal, the EU seeks to invest in monitoring and surveillance mechanisms while incentivizing its Member States to use EU-funded technology, innovative research, and projects for real-time data analysis.¹²² Such tools and services include the use of satellite and space-related technology, including the Copernicus system and the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service as part of the European Union Space Programme.¹²³

The Copernicus Emergency Management System in particular provides the EU with geo-spatial information in response to emergency situations such as natural disasters or humanitarian crises, while providing the legal and financial basis for any sub-program or system under its umbrella.¹²⁴ The European Forest Fire Information System (“EFFIS”) is one such branch of the Copernicus service.¹²⁵ EFFIS supports national and European

119. *See id.*; *see also* Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, § 3.3.2, COM (2020) 380 final (May 20, 2020), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0380> [<https://perma.cc/6828-WK2Y>] (describing Commission's dedication to invest large part of EU's budget in climate action, biodiversity, and "nature-based solutions").

120. *See Financing Guide*, *supra* note 9, at 11; *NextGenerationEU*, EU, https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en [<https://perma.cc/4PLX-7K3F>] (last visited Apr. 2, 2025).

121. *See* Nature Restoration Regulation, *supra* note 103, ¶ 21.

122. *See id.* ¶ 73.

123. *See id.*

124. *See Emergency*, COPERNICUS, <https://www.copernicus.eu/en/copernicus-services/emergency> [<https://perma.cc/PEY3-23G9>] (last visited Feb. 18, 2025).

125. *See European Forest Fire Information System*, *supra* note 10; *see also Legal Background*, COPERNICUS, <https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/about-effis/legal->

policies by operating as a facilitator of discussion in the European Parliament on issues related to wildfires.¹²⁶ According to the program, the “EFFIS provides an ideal platform for countries to exchange good practices on fire prevention, firefighting, restoration practices, and other activities related to fire management.”¹²⁷

The EFFIS provides any interested party access to satellite imagery and real time data of ongoing fires within Europe and nearby regions in the Middle East and North Africa through the use of an interactive database.¹²⁸ The service also provides information on areas designated as “protected” by the World Database on Protected Areas and areas that have been destroyed by recent fires.¹²⁹ The EFFIS likewise provides an interactive database on recent and historical fire-related news published by media in the Member States, indicating the respective regions the news stories were released in or relate to through its interactive map.¹³⁰ In addition to providing weather and fire risk forecasts,¹³¹

background [https://perma.cc/5VDW-NVCZ] (last visited Feb. 18, 2025); *Commission Expert Group on Forest Fires*, EUR. COMM’N, https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=416

[https://perma.cc/JE6R-Q6D4] (last visited Feb. 18, 2025) (expert group providing and analyzing data for reports). While the EFFIS had been in force since 1998, it became part of the Copernicus system in 2015. *See European Forest Fire Information System*, *supra* note 10.

126. *See* JESÚS SAN-MIGUEL-AYANZ ET AL., EUR. COMM’N, *FOREST FIRES IN EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA* 2023, at 8 (2024), https://effis-gwis-cms.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/effis/reports-and-publications/annual-fire-reports/Annual_Report_2023.pdf [https://perma.cc/D475-SJCJ] [hereinafter *FOREST FIRES* 2023].

127. *See id.*

128. *See European Forest Fire Information System*, *supra* note 10; *Current Situation Viewer*, COPERNICUS, https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/apps/effis.csv/?c=1000000,6200000&z=5&t=sentinel2 [https://perma.cc/Z3ST-FTR3] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

129. *See Current Situation Viewer*, *supra* note 128; *see also Protected Areas (WDPA)*, PROTECTED PLANET, https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/wdpa?tab=WDPA [https://perma.cc/YX4Z-ZSW7] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

130. *See Fire News Viewer*, COPERNICUS, https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/apps/firenews.viewer/ [https://perma.cc/GJS9-PKDE] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

131. *See generally Fire Risk*, COPERNICUS, https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/apps/fire.risk.viewer/ [https://perma.cc/S4ED-TK8B] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025); *Long-term Monthly Forecast of Temperature and Rainfall Anomalies*, COPERNICUS, https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/apps/effis.longterm.forecasts/ [https://perma.cc/GP8L-B4K7] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

the EFFIS provides statistics and trends,¹³² as well as annual reports on fires and campaign efforts against rampaging fires.¹³³

These efforts by the EU, though, are insufficient. Financing and managing reforestation only remedy the damage caused by destructive wildfires and do not tackle the root cause of wildfires themselves. The EFFIS, too, is a service centralized around fire-suppression tactics, rather than fire prevention.¹³⁴ The EU has recognized this limitation in its efforts, that fire-suppression tactics are not alone sufficient for the EU to stop fires, and that it must establish new policies dedicated to fire-prevention.¹³⁵ The EFFIS calls for the EU to adopt a “wildfire risk management approach” in conjunction with the civil protection authorities and wildfire management services and systems Member State governments apply within their borders.¹³⁶ As wildfires continue to grow into an annual recurring disaster in Europe with increasingly destructive effects on regional economies, physical and mental health, and the environment, the EU must explore new policy options and viable mechanisms for effective fire-prevention.

V. A EUROPEAN AGRARIAN FORCE?

Lessons of what succeeded and failed for the former Greek Agrofylaki may provide a potential model, or baseline, for an effective fire-prevention policy of the EU. What appears to be critical for the success of a similar agrarian force is ensuring that landowners maintain their land in a sustainable and clean fashion—clear from dry plants and overgrowth especially during peak fire-risk seasons. Comprising such a force with members or

132. See generally *EFFIS Statistics Portal*, COPERNICUS, <https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/apps/effis.statistics/> [https://perma.cc/T425-WE8J] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

133. See *Annual Fire Reports*, COPERNICUS, <https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/reports-and-publications/annual-fire-reports> [https://perma.cc/92W3-N473] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025). While not a service provided by the system, there is room for real-time maps showing the known locations of convicted arsons in Europe, although this raises significant issues on privacy and the freedom of movement which is a central right within the EU. *Id.*

134. The EU’s reactive wildfire infrastructure supported by the EFFIS is further institutionalized through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and its Emergency Response Coordination Centre, which again coordinate cross-border assistance primarily during wildfire emergencies, not prevention before ignition. See *Wildfires*, *supra* note 8.

135. See *FOREST FIRES 2021*, *supra* note 7, at 5–6.

136. See *id.*

officers who are local to regions they are assigned to patrol would provide an opportunity for these members to utilize their knowledge of the local geomorphology and landscapes, dialects, cultures, and dividing property lines of each piece of land to make the force more efficient and effective at achieving their stated objectives. Likewise, if members have some level of personal responsibility for violations of agrarian laws they knew or reasonably should have known were occurring in their assigned regions which directly resulted in the destruction of public assets or regional wealth, members would be discouraged from providing “favors” to locals who may be their families or friends.

An EU-wide system similar to that of the Agrofylaki would provide EU-based jobs for locals in rural European towns and regions. Advanced technology can also be used—including drones and Artificial Intelligence—to assist in patrols and endeavors in designated territories to ensure agrarian laws are followed and to protect land against potential malicious third-party actors. This force can likewise rely on the EFFIS to determine which areas in a given region are in particular need of more care and attention if there is heightened risk of fire, at any given time. If a region’s locals are unable or unwilling to participate in an agrarian force, it is possible that the locals of other regions within the same Member State can transfer to these underrepresented and under-protected regions within their own country so as to reduce the risk of animosity against EU officials by some locals.¹³⁷

A. An EU Force and EU Member State Sovereignty

Whether the EU can create such a body or system is an issue of Member State sovereignty and EU supranational authority. Member States hold their national sovereignty in high regard when faced with EU supranational authority, seeking to maintain their own democratic legitimacy, aspects of self-governance, national

137. Some locals of Member States, as well as Member State governments, are critical of the EU, its supranational authority, and its expansive regulation that binds and restricts European citizens. See Einar H. Dyvik, *Euroscepticism – Statistics & Facts*, STATISTA (Dec. 17, 2025), <https://www.statista.com/topics/10425/euroscepticism/> [<https://perma.cc/T5DF-XJV9>]. Forces comprised of Member State citizens of neighboring regions may lack local geomorphological or societal knowledge but may be subject to reduced animosity through shared language, culture, and understanding of national government.

identity and culture, as well as general autonomy.¹³⁸ Sovereignty concerns relating to the development and implementation of an EU agrarian force closely parallel to arguments for, and against, the creation of a European Army, and thus it can provide a useful analogue. The foundational questions are similar. Would such a force be composed of Member State national forces, or a collective EU force not belonging to any single nation?¹³⁹ If the latter, would force members rotate between serving in their national armies, or stay employed and dedicated to the EU?¹⁴⁰ What degree of autonomy, if any, would members of an EU army retain in the face of different security interests that could conflict between themselves, the EU army, and Member States such personnel originate from?¹⁴¹

Constitutional questions arise and compound these questions for some Member States, like Germany which requires parliamentary approval before any foreign military may be deployed within their borders.¹⁴² Thinking of the Agrofylaki which functioned as a quasi-military force under a local Greek Gendarmerie, would a similar EU agrarian force be considered and treated as a military force thus triggering this German legal requirement?

Generally, the EU does not provide for the establishment of supranational forces or other authorities to operate entirely independently within a Member State's borders absent that state's consent, but there are several EU provisions that, at the very least seek to encourage as much cooperation as possible between Member States and their relevant authorities. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency ("Frontex") is one such example. Frontex is a European Agency dedicated to border control and fighting border crime on the peripheries of the EU and Schengen

138. See *The European Union: The World's Biggest Sovereignty Experiment*, COUNCIL FOREIGN REL. (Feb. 14, 2023), <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/european-union-worlds-biggest-sovereignty-experiment> [<https://perma.cc/3XNE-NTDH>].

139. See Max Bergmann, *Why It's Time to Reconsider a European Army*, CTR. FOR STRATEGIC & INT'L STUD. (Feb. 28, 2025), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-its-time-reconsider-european-army/> [<https://perma.cc/SN3L-T3G5>].

140. See *id.*

141. See *id.*; Ulrike Franke, *The Never-Ending Debate of the European Army and Why It Is Unhelpful*, HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG (Jan. 22, 2024), <https://www.boell.de/en/2024/01/22/never-ending-debate-european-army-and-why-it-unhelpful> [<https://perma.cc/AX88-GT66>].

142. See Franke, *supra* note 141.

states,¹⁴³ working alongside national border control and law enforcement authorities by providing shared intelligence forums, training, monitoring, processing of migrant data, and general expertise and risk analyses.¹⁴⁴ Prior to 2016, Frontex's predecessor agency was limited to facilitating cooperation, training, and sharing information between Member States and the EU.¹⁴⁵ Following the 2015 European Migration Crisis, though, the EU developed Frontex with an expanded mandate and operational authority, notably by authorizing the agency to maintain a standing corps of uniformed individuals, the only uniformed body in the EU ready for deployment to assist in the border management and security process alongside Member States.¹⁴⁶ Frontex's standing corps are comprised of both those employed directly by the agency, as well as Member State staff which are deployed through Frontex on either a long-term or short-term basis, expected to reach 10,000 members by 2027.¹⁴⁷ Frontex officials can engage in joint operations, or even independent rapid border interventions and deportations independently from national authorities, so long as the relevant Member State consents to such activities.¹⁴⁸

The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation ("Europol") is another example. Europol possesses neither arresting nor independent investigatory authority, nor does it step on the authority of police forces of the EU Member States.¹⁴⁹ Rather, it acts as a facilitator and advisor for cooperation

143. The Schengen Area is a zone of European countries that have official open-border policies amongst those that partake in the system, and it is not exclusively limited to EU Member States. See *The Schengen Area Explained*, EUR. COUNCIL, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/schengen-area> [https://perma.cc/TDT7-BLX5] (last visited June 15, 2026).

144. See *Who We Are*, FRONTEX, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/who-we-are/tasks-mission/> [https://perma.cc/MBL7-69MM] (last visited Apr. 29, 2025).

145. See Council Regulation 2007/2004, 2004 O.J. (L 349) 1, art. 2.

146. See Regulation 2019/1896, 2019 O.J. (L 295) 1, arts. 54, 82.

147. See *European Border and Coast Guard: 10,000-Strong Standing Corps by 2027*, EUR. PARL. (Apr. 17, 2019), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190410IPR37530/european-border-and-coast-guard-10-000-strong-standing-corps-by-2027> [https://perma.cc/F4KW-ZUS2].

148. See *id.*; Regulation 2019/1896, arts. 53–54, 82.

149. See *Is Europol a European FBI?*, EUROPOL (Nov. 4, 2016), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/faq/europol-european-fbi> [https://perma.cc/H5X2-QXKW].

building between Member States and their various law enforcement agencies.¹⁵⁰

Indeed, cooperation is central to Europol's design, a principle evident in the EU's own constitutional framework. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union ("TFEU") provides the constitutional basis for the EU and its subsequent bodies. Article 87, establishing that the EU shall facilitate the cooperation of Member State law enforcement agencies in investigations and information sharing processes¹⁵¹ is central, paired with Article 88 which declares that Europol will support law enforcement agencies cooperation efforts against crime and terrorism.¹⁵² Article 89 further authorizes the European Council to impose conditions and limitations on how Member State authorities can operate in another Member State's territory, given that State's consent, for law enforcement related purposes—with Member States able to form joint investigation teams for particularly complex and demanding investigations, working alongside Europol when necessary.¹⁵³ These Articles, though, do not provide the authority or mechanism for Europol or any similar body to supersede national sovereignty without state consent, nor do they afford any such implied authority to do so.¹⁵⁴

In the pursuit of European security, there is a critical dichotomy between security and rights against the backdrop of Member State sovereignty.¹⁵⁵ Some Member States, like Germany and Italy, already have domestic court rulings which complicate the creation of any EU force directly involved with national

150. See *About Europol*, EUROPOL (July 11, 2024), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/about-europol> [<https://perma.cc/HCX8-GE2K>].

151. See Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union art. 87, Oct. 26, 2012, 2012 O.J. (C 326) 47 [hereinafter TFEU].

152. *Id.* art. 88.

153. *Id.* art. 89; Pietro Milazzo, *Interstate Cooperation*, in *TREATY ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION – A COMMENTARY: VOLUME I: PREAMBLE, ARTICLES 1–89* 1701–02 (Hermann-Josef Blanke & Stelio Mangiameli eds., 2021).

154. Another relevant TFEU article includes Article 168 incentivizing cooperation and cross-border assistance for public health-related services. See TFEU art. 168. Also relevant is Article 91 which involves cooperation on transportation security which the EU has interpreted to allow Member States to pursue traffic law infringements within their own states by an individual who is residing in a second Member State, expecting cooperation by the second Member State's relevant authorities. See TFEU art. 91; Directive 2015/413, 2015 O.J. (L 68) 9, ¶¶ 4, 7; Directive 2024/3237, 2024 O.J. (L), ¶ 1, arts. 2, 4–5(f).

155. See Milazzo, *supra* note 153, at 1646.

criminal law, criminal procedure, and the use of force.¹⁵⁶ Yet, the European Community has interpreted one of Europe's fundamental rights, the freedom of movement of persons, to require some degree of cooperation between Member States' law enforcement authorities to account for and address the security risks created by the lowering of European State borders.¹⁵⁷ Article 87 is explicit on this point, calling for cooperation between not just Member State police forces, but among all their relevant authorities that deal with law enforcement, prevention, and detection of criminal offenses.¹⁵⁸ Such cooperation is not limited to just Member State law enforcement authorities, but in practice involves cooperation directly with EU-controlled bodies, including Europol, Frontex, Eurojust, and the European Public Prosecutor's Office even if not expressly established through Article 87; at least to the point of cooperating through information sharing processes.¹⁵⁹ Against this backdrop, destructive fires that bring catastrophe to local and regional agriculture, economies, and social orders have no regard for delineated state borders. Where the EU through its TFEU explicitly encourages cooperation for safety and enforcement related purposes, an excessive focus on state sovereignty could unduly delay or outright prevent the EU from taking creative action towards fire prevention through the implementation of a new supranational agrarian force.

Operational cooperation for the collection, analysis, and exchange of information alongside relevant EU efforts while under EU guidance, while more intrusive on the "core" of national sovereignty, remains possible so long as there is unanimous agreement to the measures in the Council of the EU.¹⁶⁰ Should Member States feel their national sovereignty would be threatened by a proposed piece of legislation in the Council of the EU, they are afforded an "emergency brake" mechanism: an appeal to the European Council to pause the legislative process for four months, during which the proposed legislation must accommodate the concerned Member State in some fashion, or else be shelved

156. *See id.*

157. *See id.* at 1649–50.

158. *See id.* at 1654–55.

159. *See id.* at 1655.

160. *See id.* at 1665; TFEU art. 87.

entirely.¹⁶¹ As unanimity is required for proposals that implicate core national sovereignty, Member States can simply vote against any given proposal and achieve the same “shelving” effect as the emergency brake mechanism. However, the brake mechanism provides Member States with a means of opposing proposals while avoiding the political pressure that accompanies an appearance of obstructing EU efforts, while giving the opportunity to update proposed legislative pieces to account for the concerns and interests of the appealing Member States.

Yet even proposals on operational cooperation that fail to obtain unanimous approval from the Member States can still become EU law. If at least nine of the twenty-seven Member States agree, then a draft proposal, along with its provisions, associated organizations, procedures, and mechanisms will be created as an “enhanced cooperation mechanism,” applicable and available to the agreeing Member States.¹⁶² Enhanced cooperation mechanisms are not common, and to date none have addressed law enforcement cooperation provisions in any form, aside from the European Public Prosecutor’s Office.¹⁶³

Although the EU lacks explicit provisions authorizing the creation of an EU force with Agrofylaki-like duties to patrol and enforce agrarian laws within the borders of the Union, the above discussion shows that there are several TFEU provisions that would support such an initiative: those directly permitting cross-border cooperation mechanisms between Member States; those that the European Council has interpreted to allow cross-border mechanisms; and those that encourage and facilitate cooperation between Member States on a given issue. The most applicable is Article 87 of the TFEU and its encouragement of cooperation between law enforcing agencies related to prevention and detection of crimes—not limited to police bodies—and the

161. See Milazzo, *supra* note 153, at 1665–66; *Brake Clauses*, EU, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/brake-clauses.html> [https://perma.cc/MDA6-6HXZ] (last visited Apr. 29, 2025).

162. See TFEU art. 87; Milazzo, *supra* note 153, at 1665–66.

163. See *Enhanced Cooperation*, EU, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:enhanced_cooperation [https://perma.cc/P9EJ-3E44] (last visited Apr. 29, 2025); see also Eric Philippart, *Defragmenting the Single Market Through ‘Enhanced Cooperation’ – Why, When and Where?*, FRIENDS OF EUR. (June 10, 2026), <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/critical-thinking-defragmenting-the-single-market-through-enhanced-cooperation-why-when-and-where/> [https://perma.cc/E4SL-MWZC].

capacity to create operational cooperation mechanisms between Member States.¹⁶⁴ Even if a draft proposal for a European agrarian force fails to achieve the required unanimity, given the potentially intrusive nature of such a body on the core of national sovereignty, the EU could at the very least create an enhanced cooperation mechanism so long as nine or more Member States agree. These Member States would likely include those prone to catastrophic fires, particularly on the Southern European front, which suffers the driest conditions throughout the continent as a result of climate change and subsequent desertification that the EU has long acknowledged as a “phenomenon [] extending northwards.”¹⁶⁵

B. A Supporting EU Role for National Agrarian Forces

If the European Union cannot itself create an Agrarian force, then at the very least it ought to urge Member States, especially those who are particularly prone to destructive fires, to create domestic systems that match some characteristics or efforts of the Agrofylaki. The European Union can then assist in financing or subsidizing such bodies and efforts, while providing technological assistance, training, and general support to these forces. Funding could possibly be derived from the same portion of the MFF budget already allocated towards supporting biodiversity, or through any other fund the EU may choose or create and dedicate towards supporting such forces.

The Common Agricultural Policy of Europe (“CAP”)—one of the largest single EU expenditures generally¹⁶⁶—is another strong contender for funding, as it already provides subsidies to farmers for agricultural productivity, to rural economies for job promotion in the agricultural sector, for protection against climate change and sustainability of natural resources, and for the maintenance of

164. TFEU art. 87.

165. See EUR. CT. OF AUDITORS, SPECIAL REPORT NO. 33: COMBATING DESERTIFICATION IN THE EU: A GROWING THREAT IN NEED OF MORE ACTION 5 (2018).

166. The MFF has allocated €386.6 billion to the CAP alone. See *Common Agricultural Policy Funds*, EUR. COMM’N, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/financing-cap/cap-funds_en [<https://perma.cc/V439-3XAN>] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025); *CAP Expenditure*, EUR. COMM’N (Nov. 2024), https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/data-and-analysis/financing/cap-expenditure_en [<https://perma.cc/4YK5-W56T>].

rural landscapes.¹⁶⁷ Financial support through CAP for jobs in the agricultural sector is not limited to farmers, but includes jobs associated with machinery, animal healthcare, and food preparation and processing.¹⁶⁸ CAP also seeks to support the rural development of technology and infrastructure.¹⁶⁹ On fire prevention specifically, CAP has previously funded dedicated programs, including contributions toward improved infrastructure, investment in new technology, and other “non-remunerative investments.”¹⁷⁰ While CAP does not explicitly fund physical security, Member States may propose measures in their CAP strategic plans which, upon Commission approval, become eligible to receive funding.¹⁷¹ Given CAP’s objectives in protecting natural resources, promoting sustainability, and mitigating the effects of climate change, the development of an agrarian force modeled on the Agrofylaki could complement CAP priorities. Such a body could patrol land, promote its sustainable use, maintain its cleanliness, and deter malicious actors, all while reducing the risk of fires which can catastrophically devastate local and regional agricultural sectors; thereby using CAP financing in pursuit of its stated objectives. If the EU cannot create an independent agrarian force of the Union, then strategic, technical, and financial support for the creation and use of similar national forces would give the same benefit as a dedicated EU force in creating and providing jobs for locals of Member States, subsequently boosting local and rural economies.

Structure, authority, and objectives of national agrarian forces would naturally vary between Member States considering each State’s distinct security interests, cultural expectations, economic capabilities, and legal limitations. Ninety-nine percent of Austria’s firefighting force is comprised of volunteers.¹⁷² While volunteers

167. See *The Common Agricultural Policy at a Glance*, EUR. COMM’N, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-glance_en [https://perma.cc/W99T-AGC3] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

168. See *id.*

169. See *id.*

170. See Regulation 1305/2013, 2013 O.J. (L 347) 487, ¶ 15.

171. See *CAP Strategic Plans*, EUR. COMM’N, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans_en [https://perma.cc/W3CM-54Y7] (last visited Apr. 14, 2025).

172. BRANDWEERACADEMIE, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS IN EUROPEAN FIRE SERVICES 13 (2019); N.N. Brushlinsky et al., *WORLD FIRE STATISTICS* No. 29, at 69–72 tbl.

are unpaid, Austrian municipalities finance fire brigades with necessary equipment and provide volunteers with proper training.¹⁷³ Similarly, ninety-seven percent of Germany's and seventy-nine percent of France's firefighters are trained but not given a salary by the government, only compensated when called to duty.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, countries on the southern front that have drier conditions and are more prone to fires have more full-time members of their firefighting forces; only around fifteen percent of Greece's forces are volunteers, while Italy's includes roughly forty-two percent.¹⁷⁵ Yet, regardless of how many volunteer or professional firefighting forces each country has, and despite the frequent and destructive fires throughout Europe in recent years, as of 2024 no single EU country has spent over one percent of their general annual expenditures on fire protective services.¹⁷⁶ Particularly for the countries relying heavily on volunteer forces, and given that the EU already provides training programs and facilitates coordination between Member States in emergency situations,¹⁷⁷ the EU could easily expand the logistical, financial, and strategic assistance it provides to national efforts for agrarian force patrol-like endeavors.

1.13 (2024), https://www.ctif.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/CTIF_Report29_ERG.pdf [<https://perma.cc/TA2Q-MVUE>].

173. See Barbara Gerber, *Puch Fire Department & St. Jakob Fire Brigade*, PUCH SALZBURG (Apr. 20, 2023), <https://www.puch-salzburg.com/en/magazine/fire-department.htm> [<https://perma.cc/68ZP-LW6S>].

174. See BRANDWEERACADEMIE, *supra* note 172; Jennifer Wagner, *Germany's Volunteer Firefighters*, DW (July 18, 2021), <https://www.dw.com/en/explainer-why-does-germany-rely-heavily-on-voluntary-fire-services/a-58305339> [<https://perma.cc/VAR3-K42H>]; Martina Propson-Hauck, "We Are Ready to Go into Action at Any Time," DEUTSCHLAND (Dec. 4, 2024), <https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/voluntary-fire-services-in-germany> [<https://perma.cc/NBX7-GPPC>]; *Volunteer Firefighter (VPD)*, RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE (Apr. 14, 2025), <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F72?lang=en> [<https://perma.cc/2NVA-HLQV>].

175. See Brushlinsky et al., *supra* note 172, at 69–72 tbl. 1.13.

176. *General Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG)*, EUROSTAT, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp_custom_16281516/default/table?lang=en [<https://perma.cc/6VR6-8YG8>] (last visited Mar. 22, 2025) (fire-protective services expenditures, 2023). Romania was the only country to reach 0.9% of its annual expenditures on fire-protective services in 2023, while no other country surpassed 0.7%. See *id.*

177. See *Firefighters*, WHAT EUROPE DOES FOR ME, <https://what-europe-does-for-me.europarl.europa.eu/en/social/B38> [<https://perma.cc/C6B8-52G5>] (last visited Apr. 15, 2025).

Alternatively, Member States could take more unique approaches in engaging in Agrofylaki-like duties. Consider Greece: a new agrarian force could theoretically operate as a branch of the military, offering Greek conscripts an alternative means of completing their mandatory military service in the country, either in their own home locale or if assigned to less-populated rural regions in need of such services. As uniformed military officers, they would theoretically command respect from locals, reducing the risk of extortion or partiality that could arise when patrolling one's own home regions because of family or friend relations. Alternatively, such an agrarian force could be structured as a form of civil service, giving conscripts the option to substitute their otherwise mandatory military service with agrarian duties. After completing their service in either case, individuals could be offered continued employment opportunities with the force, either in their home locales or other desired regions of the country. Though, if an agrarian force was established as part of military service, questions as to whether the EU could subsidize or fund such military activities would remain.

Should the EU prove wholly unable to create a specialized and independent EU agrarian force, to subsidize or support national forces or attempts to engage in agrarian police-like activities, or even encourage states to make similar forces, then options to privatize such agrarian forces could be considered. Whether privatizing an agrarian police force would directly conflict with national interests in providing fire security would again depend on national laws, although the fact that many EU countries already rely on volunteers rather than government employees to provide firefighting services somewhat alleviates this concern. Theoretically, an international corporation could hire locals from each region to maintain and secure their home territories and national governments could subsidize such enterprises, though total annual expenditures on fire-protective services by Member States already fail to reach above one percent across EU governments. A further concern would likewise arise as to whether privatized forces could create a moral hazard—that private forces are incentivized to expose themselves or areas they are working in to risk in order to maximize potential profits and other economic benefits. While a national government or EU-controlled agrarian

forces would be more ideal, it is nonetheless a useful option to consider.¹⁷⁸

VI. CONCLUSION

With changing weather conditions throughout Europe and the world, with increasingly more extreme and unstable winters and scorching and prolonged summers, the risk of fires across Europe is increasing, especially in its fire-prone regions.¹⁷⁹ Ninety-six percent of fires in Europe already result from some sort of intentional or accidental human activity,¹⁸⁰ but the risks that climate change poses with increasingly dry conditions paired with overgrown rural territories leads to the chance that these fires will last for days or even weeks, burning millions to billions of euros worth of property, killing hundreds and traumatizing an equal amount, and destroying agricultural industries ever more frequently. Fires can unfortunately also serve various personal and political purposes through arson, as shown by a woman in Greece setting fires because “she enjoyed watching firefighters and flirting with them”¹⁸¹ and the mafia setting fires for control and financial gain in Italy.¹⁸²

Considering the destructive effects and potential of wildfires, and the incentives some malicious actors have in setting them, the EU and its Member States must act promptly to establish fire-prevention policies to deter the start of fires, aside from and in

178. While no longer in the EU, the United Kingdom appears to have one privatized fire-service company that specializes in “bespoke or expected” emergency situations and claims to be able to relocate anywhere in mainland Europe within forty-eight hours, although it “can be and has been a logistical nightmare” to do so. *See About DDA Fire*, DDA FIRE, https://www.ddafire.co.uk/About_DDA_Fire.html [https://perma.cc/9SZP-QEX2] (last visited Feb. 19, 2025). The force’s use-case appears to focus more so on consulting and film-related services. *See id.*

179. *See Forest Fires*, EUR. COMM’N, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/natural-and-man-made-hazards/fires_en [https://perma.cc/DK79-75MP] (last visited Apr. 17, 2025).

180. *See FOREST FIRES 2021*, *supra* note 7, at 4; *see also FOREST FIRES 2023*, *supra* note 126, at 6 (reiterating same ninety-six percent figure two years after previous report by the Commission’s Joint Research Centre).

181. *See* Anastasia Markela Dana, *Woman Set Fires in Greece “to Watch Firefighters and Flirt,”* GREEK REP. (Aug. 28, 2024), <https://greekreporter.com/2024/08/28/woman-set-fires-greece-tripoli-firefighters-arson/> [https://perma.cc/23EA-VRUM].

182. *See* Laura Paddison, *How the Mafia Is Weaponizing Wildfires*, CNN (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/27/climate/mafia-wildfire-italy/index.html> [https://perma.cc/M2PF-RAE3].

addition to existing measures which focus primarily on stopping the spread of active fires and remedying the damage and effects they cause after the fact. Given the human casualties and economic losses caused by destructive fires in Europe each year, investment in such preventative capacity could be understood as a long-term financial measure, reducing the costs that would otherwise be incurred through recurring emergency response, property damage, ecological destruction, and post-fire recovery. While there are other fire prevention tactics Member States can, and should, employ—like fire breaks and controlled burns to mitigate the potential spread of fires—having a body or force entirely dedicated to agrarian security modeled on the Agrofylaki could provide a continuous, localized presence capable of enforcing sustainable land use and deterring harmful practices which could lead to destructive ecological effects and catastrophic wildfires, especially in rural areas. The Agrofylaki was not a force exclusively dedicated to fire prevention. Rather, it operated with a holistic mandate to safeguard the maintenance, sustainability, and integrity of land under its watch, before its devolution during the Cold War. While not its exclusive purpose, fire prevention was an additional benefit to the force's objective in deterring public and private land degradation, neglect, misuse, and abuse.

The EU has both the funds and the capacity to create such a group. While sovereignty issues are central on whether the Union can make an authoritative force acting within the Member States, precedent on the European Parliament's and Council's interpretation of its authority to create cooperation and cross-border mechanisms exist—especially with Frontex which deals with law enforcement and border security on the peripheries of the EU, which are the borders of its various Member States. Should the EU not be able to make an agrarian force on its own, then it ought to create policies to encourage, train, supply, fund, and generally assist national Member State efforts to create similar bodies to create a stronger and safer Europe.