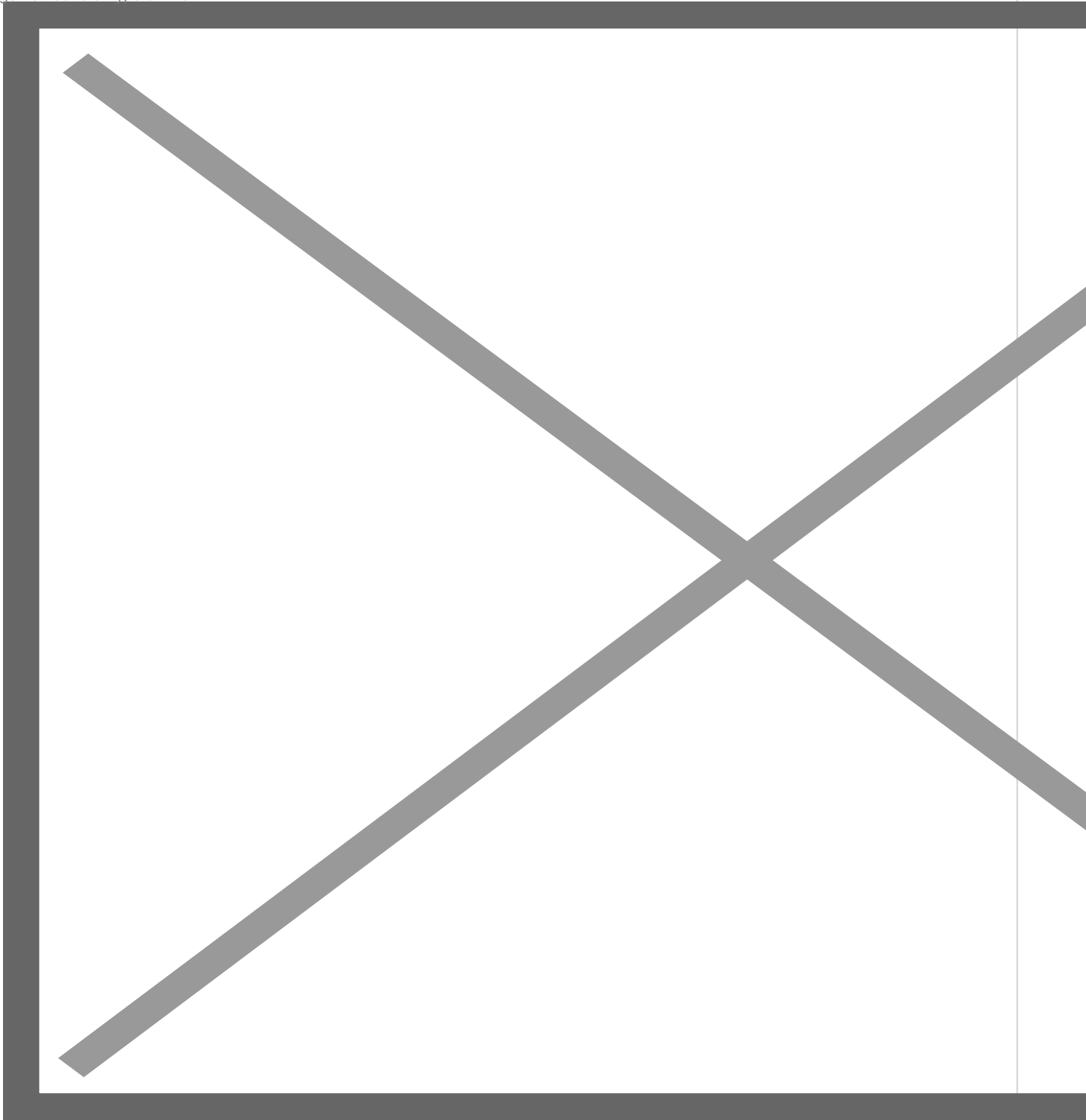


Europe sees record warm winter temps

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Ski resorts shut down due to lack of snow as continent records warmest days in January on record.

Madrid, January 5 (RHC)-- Record high winter temperatures have swept across parts of Europe into the New Year, bringing calls from climate activists for faster action against global warming while offering short-term respite to governments struggling with high gas prices. Hundreds of sites have seen temperature records smashed, from Switzerland to Poland and Hungary.

In France, temperatures climbed to nearly 25 C (77 F) in the southwest on New Year's Day while normally bustling European ski resorts were deserted due to a lack of snow.

The Weather Service in Germany, where temperatures of more than 20C (68F) were recorded, said such a mild change of the year had not been observed in the country since records began in 1881.

Scientists have not yet analysed the specific ways in which climate change might have affected the recent high temperatures, but January's warm weather fits into a long-term trend of rising temperatures due to human-caused global warming. "Winters are becoming warmer in Europe as a result of global temperatures increasing," said Freja Vamborg, climate scientist at the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

The record temperatures follow another year of extreme weather that scientists concluded was directly linked to global warming, including deadly heatwaves in Europe and India and flooding in Pakistan.

Temperature spikes can also cause plants to start growing earlier in the year or coax animals out of hibernation prematurely, making them vulnerable to being killed off by later cold snaps. The French national weather agency, Météo France, attributed the anomalous temperatures to a mass of warm air moving into Europe from subtropical areas.

It struck during the busy skiing season, leading to cancelled trips and empty slopes. Resorts in the northern Spanish regions of Asturias, Leon and Cantabria have been closed since the Christmas holidays for lack of snow.

On Jahorina mountain above the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, which hosted the 1984 Winter Olympics, it should have been one of the busiest weeks of the season. Instead, chairlifts hung suspended above grassy slopes. In one guesthouse, a couple ate dinner alone in a restaurant as the only guests.

A ski jumping event in Zakopane in southern Poland planned for the weekend of January 7-8 was cancelled.

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