

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001519/24
to the Commission
Kostas Papadakis (NI), Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos (NI)
(19 August 2024)**

Subject: Devastating forest fires in Attica

One woman dead, dozens of houses burned down, businesses and thousands of acres of forest destroyed: such is the toll of the disastrous fire in North-East Attica.

Government talk of the 'preparedness' of the state apparatus has collapsed in ruins: all the authorities have done is issue endless evacuation orders and throw the blame provocatively on climate change and 'protracted drought'.

Tragically, this proves yet again that it is the utter lack of preventive measures (such as forest upkeep and the creating of firebreaks) and the disastrous shortfalls in the services responsible (there are still some 4 000 established firefighter posts left unfilled) that have led to the results we have all seen.

The propaganda about 'European solidarity' is also falling apart. The mechanism for recycling meagre firefighting resources from one country to another, rescEU as it is called, was activated only after a critical day on which fires advanced out of control on a number of fronts, with most of the resources arriving on the second day.

In view of this:

1. What is the Commission's stance on the urgent need for fire victims to be paid 100% compensation for their losses from the EU Solidarity Fund?
2. What is its position on the fact that the forestry and land commercialisation policy and the cost-benefit principle are obstacles to the drawing up of integrated plans, with the deployment of sufficient staff and resources, and the appropriate infrastructure for fire prevention and protection, when the impact of fires on ordinary people's lives is so tragic?
3. What responsibility does it think the EU and governments bear for the fact that, because of the cost-benefit principle, there are still only minimal firefighting resources available, with the rescEU mechanism recycling them from country to country and with long delays?

Submitted: 19.8.2024

**Answer given by Ms Ferreira on behalf of the European Commission
(24 October 2024)**

1. The EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) ⁽¹⁾ can only be activated at the request of Greece which has a deadline of 12 weeks as from when the first damage occurred, demonstrating that the total direct damage exceeds the thresholds specified in Article 2 Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002. It may cover the costs of emergency and recovery operations by the public authorities. Private damage is not eligible. So far, Greece has not requested EUSF assistance for this disaster.
2. Overall, more than EUR 2 billion are planned under Cohesion Policy to support the prevention and management of fire risk. These investments target the reduction of the vulnerability of more than 130 million people to wildfire risk, particularly in regions with higher risk of wildfire exposure. The 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy programmes for Greece include allocations for addressing fire risk prevention and management actions, with a total public funding of EUR 421 million. Under shared management, Greece decides how to deploy these funds, in line with the applicable regulatory framework, and the objectives and priorities set up in the above-mentioned programmes.
3. Regarding the organisation and functioning of firefighting services, the Commission refers to the reply to written question 000020/2024 of 28 February 2024 ⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3) as amended by Regulation (EU) No 661/2014 of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 May 2014 (OJ L 189, 27.6.2014, p. 143) and by Regulation (EU) 2020/461 of the European Parliament and the Council of 30 March 2020 (OJ L 99, 31.3.2020, p. 9).

⁽²⁾ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2024-000020-ASW_EN.html