

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001640/24
to the Commission**

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(5 September 2024)

Subject: Lethal fires in Attica

Over the past couple of days, North-East Attica has gone up in flames, with images of biblical destruction in urban and forest locations being broadcast around the world. According to the Hellenic Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection, there are 702 firefighters, 27 forest commando and volunteer teams, 199 vehicles, 17 aeroplanes and 18 helicopters operating in the region.

Winds are so high that fresh outbreaks of fire are constantly occurring, making it necessary to evacuate local populations, hospital units and even children's camps in the areas affected. More than 20 homes have so far been destroyed, and more than 250 people have been rescued from the flames.

The prolonged drought, lack of rain and high winds are contributing to the rapid spread of the fire. France, Italy, Czechia, Cyprus and Romania have responded immediately to the Greek Government's appeal for help through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

Since the consequences of climate change are obvious:

1. Is the Commission planning to activate the European Solidarity Fund immediately so that Greece is given emergency financial support in dealing with the consequences of the lethal fires?
2. Under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, does it consider that an EU base needs to be established in Mediterranean countries during the summer period so that there is a more effective mechanism for rapid intervention in dealing with fires?

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

The EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) can only be activated at the request of Greece within 12 weeks as from the first damage occurred, demonstrating that the total direct damage exceeds the thresholds specified in Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 ⁽¹⁾.

The EUSF may cover part of the costs for emergency and recovery operations incurred by public authorities. This includes, for example, the recovery of essential infrastructure, provision of temporary accommodation to the population, cleaning-up operations, and protection of cultural heritage. So far, Greece has not requested the EUSF assistance for this disaster.

With response remaining primarily a national competence, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism ⁽²⁾ is already prepositioning ground and aerial resources in forest fire-prone countries.

This summer, 240 firefighters from Bulgaria, Moldova, Malta and Romania were prepositioned in Greece from 1 July to 15 September 2024 to support the Greek response to forest fires. During the fire in Attica, 80 firefighters from Moldova, Malta and Romania have been immediately deployed as first responders.

Regarding aerial resources, the EU is financing, as of 15 June until end of October 2024, 75% stand-by costs of two Canadairs firefighting planes, two light scooping planes and one heavy helicopter located in Greece as part of the rescEU safety net response ⁽³⁾. All these assets are available for a European response and primarily operate on the Greek territory.

In addition, the EU has signed a grant agreement with Greece for the purchase of two Canadairs that will complement the national response.

⁽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://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en#:~:text=In%20October%202001%2C%20the%20European%20Commission%20established%20the,to%20improve%20prevention%2C%20preparedness%2C%20and%20response%20to%20disasters

⁽³⁾ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/resceu_en