

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002195/24
to the Commission
Valentina Palmisano (The Left), Mario Furore (The Left)
(21 October 2024)**

Subject: Urgent measures to protect Apulia's monumental olive trees threatened by *Xylella fastidiosa*

The bacteria *Xylella fastidiosa* is devastating Apulia's traditional olive groves; already more than 21 million olive trees have been lost. Among the most endangered specimens are around 350 000 monumental olive trees, some of which are thousands of years old, which represent an incomparable source of wealth not only for Italy but also for Europe as a whole. Their loss would cause irreparable damage to the environment, the economy and Europe's cultural heritage. Although early grafting has proven to be an effective solution for preserving these trees, significant financial support will be needed we wish to carry it out.

Given the existing EU legislation, such as Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species and Directive (EU) 2019/782 on harmonised risk indicators, coordinated action is needed to address this emergency.

In view of the above:

1. What action does the Commission intend to take, under Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 and Directive (EU) 2019/782, to combat the spread of *Xylella* and protect Puglia's monumental olive trees?
2. Is there any special or emergency EU funding to support local, regional and national initiatives to conserve these olive trees, with particular emphasis on early grafting?
3. Does the Commission intend to launch a Europe-wide research and innovation plan to find lasting solutions to deal with *Xylella fastidiosa*?

Submitted: 21.10.2024

**Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(13 January 2025)**

1. *Xylella fastidiosa* (*Xf*)⁽¹⁾ is a quarantine pest listed in Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2072⁽²⁾, not in Regulation (EU) 1143/2014⁽³⁾. The Commission adopted Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1201⁽⁴⁾ to prevent its introduction and spread. This regulation allows Member States to authorise grafting in infected zones subject to containment. Commission Directive (EU) 2019/782⁽⁵⁾ as regards the establishment of harmonised risk indicators does not provide any basis for action to combat the spread of *Xf* in Puglia.

2. The European Agriculture on Rural Development Fund supported farmers hit by *Xf*, through Physical investments (sub-measure 4.1), Risk-preventing investments (5.1) and Restoration of damaged production potential (5.2). This aid did not include grafting, which was however supported through national schemes.

Under Sectoral interventions, the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund may support: — replanting olive groves after mandatory grubbing-up for phytosanitary reasons;

— Investments in tangible and intangible assets;

— Research and experimental and innovative production methods; and

— Other actions, including improving resilience against pests.

⁽¹⁾ All the information below as regards legislation applicable, financial support and research programmes may be seen in the following Commission website: https://food.ec.europa.eu/plants/plant-health-and-biosecurity/legislation/control-measures/xylella-fastidiosa_en

⁽²⁾ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/2072 of 28 November 2019 establishing uniform conditions for the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and the Council, as regards protective measures against pests of plants, and repealing Commission Regulation (EC) No 690/2008 and amending Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/2019. OJ L 319, 10.12.2019, p. 1-279.

⁽³⁾ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/1143/oj>

⁽⁴⁾ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/1201 of 14 August 2020 as regards measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Union of *Xylella fastidiosa* (Wells *et al.*) OJ L 269, 17.8.2020, p. 2-39.

⁽⁵⁾ Commission Directive (EU) 2019/782 of 15 May 2019 amending Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the establishment of harmonised risk indicators OJ L 127, 16.5.2019, p. 4-10.

3. The EU has been actively addressing *Xf* through research and innovation projects under the previous research and innovation programme Horizon 2020 ⁽⁶⁾ and the current one Horizon Europe ⁽⁷⁾. The **Bexyl Project** ⁽⁸⁾, which started on 2022 with nearly EUR 7 million, focuses on integrated management strategies to mitigate *Xf*'s impact in Europe. The **BIOVEXO Project** ⁽⁹⁾ is developing and testing innovative biopesticides targeting *Xf* and its spittlebug vectors. Since 2015, the EU has funded key projects like **POnTE** ⁽¹⁰⁾ and **XF-ACTORS** ⁽¹¹⁾, providing critical knowledge and tools to tackle this plant health threat.

⁽⁶⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-2020_en

⁽⁷⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

⁽⁸⁾ Beyond *Xylella*, Integrated Management Strategies for Mitigating *Xylella fastidiosa* impact in Europe — <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060593>

⁽⁹⁾ Biocontrol of *Xylella* and its vector in olive trees for integrated pest management — <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/887281>

⁽¹⁰⁾ Pest Organisms Threatening Europe — <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/635646>

⁽¹¹⁾ *Xylella Fastidiosa* Active Containment Through a multidisciplinary-Oriented Research Strategy — <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/727987>